DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 443 CG 024 906

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TITLE "How To Do What's Best for YOU" - A Workshop for Adolescents.
PUB DATE Mar 92
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of "The Troubled Adolescent: The Nation's Concern and Its Response" Conference (2nd, San Antonio, TX, March 17-20, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescent Development; *Adolescents; *Assertiveness; Individual Power; Personal Autonomy; *Self Esteem; Values; *Values Clarification; Workshops

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a guide for persons interested in conducting a workshop designed to introduce a process or strategy to help adolescents self-generate strokes to foster positive self-esteem. The steps in the process include: (1) introduction to the notion that each person has the power to take control of and direct his or her own life; (2) an understanding of the importance of self-awareness; (3) acknowledgment of one or more personal strengths; (4) recognition of the difference between bragging and self-praise; (5) a values clarification exercise; and (6) realization of the relationship between behavior based on one's values and one's subsequent level of self-esteem. The workshop is presented in an informal style and requires that the workshop leader rephrase passages into his or her own words. Scripts are included throughout the paper (designated by two asterisks and quotation marks) for participants to read which present scenarios illustrating the ideas being taught in the workshop. (Author/NB)

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"How to Do What's Best for YOU" - A Workshop for Adolescents

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Abstract

The primary objective of this workshop is to introduce a process or strategy to help adolescents self-generate strokes to foster positive self-esteem. The steps in the process include: 1) introduction to the notion that each of us has the power to take control of and direct our own life; 2) an understanding of the importance of self-awareness; 3) acknowledgment of one or more personal strengths; 4) recognition of the difference between bragging and self-praise; 5) a values clarification exercise; and 6) realization of the relationship between a) behavior based on one's values and b) one's subsequent level of self-esteem.

The workshop is presented in an informal style and requires that the workshop leader rephrase passages into her/his own words. Also included are scripts for participants to read which are designated by two asterisks (**) and quotation marks.

CG024906

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"How to Do What's Best for YOU" - A Workshop for Adolescents

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Introduction

Administer a locus of control scale to participants, emphasizing that there are no right or wrong answers. Allow sufficient time for scale completion (5 minutes). Distribute scripts.

Explain the scoring of the instrument and stress that it is simply one means of measuring the extent to which each of us perceives to have control over major (and minor) events in our lives.

Some people feel that they have very little control over their lives, that outside circumstances determine what happens to them. People at the other end of this continuum feel responsible for many of their successes (and failures) in life; they believe that major decisions, which they themselves make, determine to a great extent what happens to them.

After looking at your score, you may decide that you need to take more control of your life. In other words, don't just **let** things happen to you -- **make** things happen that are good for you. Take an active part in carving and directing your future.

In order to take control of your life and maintain that control, there are certain steps you need to take. The first step involves **self-awareness**.

Important of Self-Awareness

A lot of people, including adults, drift through life, not knowing who they really are or where they are going. They depend on other people to compliment or praise them, or to tell them what to do or when to feel good about themselves.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to really get to know ourselves. Why? Because the process of mentally looking closely at yourself -- called **introspection** -- requires some quiet concentration and a **lot of honesty**. Yet, in order to determine what direction you want your life to take, you need to know your likes, dislikes, skills, strengths, weaknesses, and values.

Self-Praise is Critical to High Self-Esteem

Most of us do not take the time to think about these different parts of ourselves. But I would like for you to do that right now using this worksheet.

(Have the students respond to a worksheet, consisting of at least 10 open-ended statements [e.g., "When people first meet me, they...." or "When I'm in a group, I ...."]. Be sure to include the following as one of the items: "One of my greatest strengths is ...." In the material below, this latter item will be referred to as item 2. It will help students to hear **varied** examples of "strengths", such as, "I'm really good at repairing my car.")

Allow 5 minutes for this activity; the worksheet items not assigned should be completed at home. Next, ask the students to form triads to share responses to item 2, which asks for an individual strength. Participants may need to physically move their chairs/desks to form triads.

After the groups have had a few minutes to interact and share, ask how it felt to talk about a personal strength. "Bragging" and "embarrassing" hopefully will surface as descriptors.

Rephrase: Don't fall into the trap of depending on others to praise you! Compliment yourself. It is not a sign of conceit or bragging to do this. Listen to these two different statements, and I think you'll see the point I'm making.

Ask students to read the scripts which clarify the difference between bragging (** "My essay on Poe was the **best** in the class!") and self-praise (** "Hey, I really did well on that essay on Poe. It's much better than my last essay.") Point out that the person who brags, compares himself/herself to others in a way which deprecates or belittles them.

Emphasize that, in order to take control of your life, you need to feel good about yourself, and this is accomplished through recognition of personal strengths and self-praise for jobs well done. Point out that we should always try to build on our strengths and polish our skills and abilities.

The Volatile Nature of Self-Esteem

The degree to which you value yourself and value what you do, falls under the term, **self-esteem**. Self-esteem is a personal judgment of your own self-worth, and it is based on how you see yourself and on what you believe your abilities and skills to be.

Self-esteem can be high, low, or somewhere in between those extremes. It can vary from day to day or hour to hour, depending upon the circumstances.

Self-esteem influences behavior to a great extent. When faced with a challenge, people who believe that they can do it, will most likely try and probably succeed. This is an example of **high** self-esteem. In contrast, people with **low** self-esteem fail because they do not even bother to try (i.e., they may think: "What's the point? I'm no good at this anyway....").

So far, we have said that it is important to learn about yourself, to discover your strengths and build on them, and to praise or compliment yourself. These steps are critical to maintaining good mental health.

Values Clarification Exercise

Select students to read scripts for "The Exam" (see story below). Next ask participants to select a "villain" and a "hero(ine)" from the story by a show of hands, while emphasizing that **none** of the behaviors were honorable. Briefly discuss responses as a group. Disagreements will be inevitable; emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers.

"The Exam"

** "Wendell was studying hard for an exam. It was important that Wendell pass the exam in order to get into college, but he was afraid that he wouldn't pass it.

** Carmen, Wendell's girlfriend, felt sorry for him and wanted to help. She went to see a former student, named Terrence, who took the same exam last year and still had the exam questions.

** Carmen asked Terrence if he would give her the exam questions so that she could give them to Wendell to help him study. Terrence said he would give her the questions if she would steal a bottle of rare, aged Scotch whiskey from her parents' liquor cabinet.

** Carmen agreed to steal the whiskey. When she gave the exam questions to Wendell, he was furious. He said he didn't want the questions and said that he never wanted to see Carmen again.

** Carmen, who was really mad at Wendell now, went to see her friend, Lute, and told him the story. Lute said he'd get even with Wendell. Lute let the air out of Wendell's tires so that Wendell couldn't get to school in time and missed taking the exam. Carmen was delighted with this turn of events."

The Importance and Changing Nature of Values

What we are talking about here are values. Your values are those beliefs which you hold to be worthwhile and highly desirable. Your views on the characters in the story point to the fact that we do not always have the same values as other people, not even our friends and classmates.

Sometimes it is useful to think about and to talk about values because, generally, we are not conscious or aware of our particular values even though we put them into practice on a daily basis. For instance, most people consider **honesty** to be a strong value, but when we talk to people, we don't have to continually remind ourselves to tell the truth.

Once you think about and determine what your values are, then you will be able to make important decisions, based on **your** beliefs and **not** based on impulse, emotion, pressure from others, or a friend's advice.

Some of our values change as we mature and develop new skills and interests. Consider Fred. When he was in grade school, Fred resisted taking showers and generally looked and smelled like a pig sty. Now that Fred is in junior high school, he is very meticulous in his bathing habits and places great value on looking well groomed. So, as in the case of Fred, our values **can** and **do** change.

Challenges to Our Values

Situations occur when other people put pressure on us to do things that really go against our values. When we succumb to these pressures and behave in ways that oppose our values, then our self-esteem suffers.

Let's look at an example, the case of Henry. There'll be a script to read for this, but first let me describe Henry.

Henry is 16 years old and strongly believes in and practices his religion. Lately Henry has made several fishing trips with a new group of friends who drink beer while boating on the lake. Henry used to really enjoy fishing, but now he feels guilty because his religion forbids the drinking of alcoholic beverages. Henry's self-esteem is at a low point.

Ask someone to read the following script, spoken by Henry:
** "I really like to fish, but these guys...I don't know about these guys. I feel guilty. I feel so guilty when I go to church. If the people knew, I'd get kicked out of church. If Mom or Dad knew about all of this drinking, man, I'd really get grounded for good!!"

Now let's see what happens when we practice our beliefs and adhere to our values. Let me describe Amy, who is 14 years old. Amy likes to stay in shape by doing aerobics at least twice a week. Physical fitness is one of her values, and she feels really good about herself after each workout because she is doing something that she believes is worthwhile.

Ask someone to read the following script, spoken by Amy:
** "Boy, my muscles feel all toned and strong. I feel just great! Everyone should do a workout just to get this wonderful feeling. It's too bad more people don't exercise. I'm glad I've made aerobics a routine. It took a lot of will power at first, but now I wouldn't miss my aerobics class for anything!"

Defense of Values through Assertiveness

Let's summarize what we've said so far. In order to have control of your life, you need first to become aware of yourself, then acknowledge your positive qualities and successes in order to maintain a healthy self-esteem, which, in turn, influences your behavior and what you're even willing to try. And you need to base your decisions on your own values, not those of other people.

But, how do you say "no" to someone who is putting pressure on you to do something? What do you do if a person approaches you and wants you to do something you don't want to do -- something that goes against your values? How do you deal with that situation and that person?

There are 3 ways in which a person can react. A person who responds in an **aggressive** manner generally says or does something to put the other person down in one way or another.

A **nonassertive** person does and says things to avoid conflict at almost any cost, including hiding his or her own true feelings and beliefs.

An **assertive** person communicates his or her feelings in a direct, honest way without putting the other person down. This is the **best** way to behave if you want to stand up for yourself and your values.

Illustration of Assertiveness

Ask participants to read the scripts below which depict 3 versions of an

imaginary encounter between Mary, who is on her way to class after lunch, and Pat, who wants Mary to ditch class. Each version illustrates one of the 3 types of responses, mentioned above. Ask students to classify each of the following responses.

** 1st scene
Pat: Come on...let's ditch class! Buddy's got his dad's car today, and he's ready to split NOW!
Mary: No, you idiot! After Mr. Murry's crackdown last week, only a moron would ditch today!

** 2nd scene
Pat: Come on...let's ditch class! Buddy's got his dad's car today, and he's ready to split NOW!
Mary: Well, I don't know. I guess I'd better not. Mrs. Jones would notice I'm missing.
Pat: Nah, she wouldn't...not in that big class. Come on. Let's go. Buddy's not gonna wait much longer.
Mary: Well, I'm not sure. If my parents found out, I'd be busted....

** 3rd scene
Pat: Come on...let's ditch class! Buddy's got his dad's car today, and he's ready to split NOW!
Mary: No. I'm not interested. (Turns and walks away.)

Emphasize that when you respond in a nonassertive way, you usually end up in a pattern of having to give explanations and excuses for not doing something. On the other hand, a very firm and simple response of, "No, I don't want to do that," is always a direct, assertive response.

Keep in mind that we are talking about situations where your values have been challenged. Assertive behavior in response to a teacher's or parent's request simply because you don't want to do something will only lead to big trouble!

There is one thing to keep in mind when you think about this type of situation. When a person continues to badger or nag you into doing something that you don't want to do, that person is really saying: "Your wishes don't count. What I want you to do is more important."

This message shows you no respect and implies that you don't count as a person. You do count as a person, and your values are important, so be assertive!

Ask if there are any questions or comments about anything mentioned or discussed in the workshop. Summarize main points. Distribute copies of the poem, "Self-Esteem", by Virginia Satir.